

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 217 388

CS 006 700

AUTHOR McAfee, Deurelle
 TITLE Effect of Sentence Combining on Fifth Grade Reading and Writing Achievement.
 PUB DATE Dec 81
 NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (31st, Dallas, TX, December 2-5, 1981).
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Grade 5; Intermediate Grades; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Research; *Sentence Combining; *Writing (Composition); Writing Skills
 IDENTIFIERS *Reading Writing Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effects of sentence combining instruction on the reading comprehension and writing maturity of fifth grade children. The sample consisted of an experimental and a control group with 25 children in each group. For 6 weeks the experimental group received instruction in sentence combining, defined for purposes of the study as the manipulation of sentence patterns to produce complex sentences. At the end of the treatment, both groups were tested for reading comprehension, writing maturity, and improvement of free writing. The results showed that students who received sentence combining instruction had significantly improved reading comprehension, written language, and free writing scores when compared to the students who had received no sentence combining instruction. The findings suggest that manipulation of discourse is an effective means of providing greater recognition of the intended meaning of authors. (HTH)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED217383

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

+ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Deurelle McAfee, Ph.D., Lecturer
University of Texas at Dallas
3060 Sundial Drive
Dallas, Texas 75229
(214) 247-3997

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Deurelle McAfee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Effect of Sentence Combining on Fifth
Grade Reading and Writing Achievement

Deurelle McAfee

University of Texas at Dallas

As a child moves toward maturity and develops a language system, and acquires a writing system, there is interrelatedness of language, cognition, and comprehension, and the developmental characteristics apparent in the acquisition of communicative arts, both productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) (Elkind, 1970; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Researchers have shown that developmental characteristics continue into the teen years and beyond, and that language development can be increased by pedagogical intervention (Nelson, 1977; O'Donnell, Griffin & Norris, 1967; Palmero & Molfese, 1972).

CS88670D

Deborah Merice

The problem of determining a child's reading comprehension is perennial. It is possible for a child to comprehend language structures without being able to produce them as evidenced by a child's understanding of speech before the child talks with facility (Menyuk, 1977). Determining how well a child comprehends what he or she reads and how to increase this comprehension has been addressed in various ways. Among them, writing has been advocated as a means of understanding other writers (Richards, 1942; Christensen, 1967).

The structures a child writes appear to be a good indicator of what a child understands (Smith, 1971). O'Hare (1973) went further and stated that knowing how to write influenced what was written. Pedagogical intervention to increase a child's written syntactic fluency should also increase his fluency in comprehending another author's syntax (Stotsky, 1975).

Related Research

A frame theory of knowledge acquisition in which language has a network of interactive frames and concept frames, scenarios, schema, or scripts of individual world knowledge provides evidence of the need for a repertory of prototypes and context characteristics to further the relevant linguistic choices in language acquisition (Minsky, 1975; Fillmore, 1976).

The trend toward a natural developmental increase in production of syntax between grades five and seven (Palmero & Molfese, 1972) makes grade five an appropriate time for

instruction to increase the quality and quantity of comprehension and production of syntactic structures through writing.

Pedagogical intervention in the form of instruction in sentence-combining manifests central effects such as learning to manipulate complex syntactic patterns through changes in linguistic ability, fluency in production, skillful reprocessing of language, mnemonic ability to hold in memory longer and longer stretches of discourse; and the peripheral effects of general improvement of over-all use of language (Miller & Ney, 1968; Hunt, 1970; O'Hare, 1973; Cooper, 1973; Strong, 1976).

The generation of more complex structures becomes a part of a student's performance ability, which in turn improves ability to comprehend similar structures encountered in connected discourse (Smith, 1971). Thus reading ability is enhanced by writing ability (Stotsky, 1975).

Approaches to teaching composition may be grouped roughly into: (1) those that provide content through reading matter and subjective writing, (2) those based on the premise that language is an expression of thought with general concern for drawing inference and making generalizations, (3) a linguistic approach which in addition to traditional usage, diction, and syntax, includes oral and written sentence pattern manipulation to produce more complex sentences (sentence-combining), and (4) rhetoric with relationships between speaker, subject and audience

emphasized in a process of prewriting, writing, and revision (Memering, 1971). Since in the real world such arbitrary division is often difficult to follow, this study sought to emphasize an extension of the linguistic sentence-combining approach while recognizing the overtones of the other three as found in the traditional language arts curriculum of an elementary classroom.

Method

This study was designed to investigate the effects of sentence-combining instruction on the reading comprehension and writing maturity of fifth-grade children. Both motivated and unmotivated samples of writing were tested. The study focused on the differences between two groups of subjects and on the relationship of the scores achieved by each group on the measuring instruments, The Test of Reading Comprehension (1978), The Test of Written Language (1978), and a qualitative analysis of two free writing samples using TOWL procedures. The statistical analysis included two analyses of covariance and a proportional comparison used to determine significant differences at the .05 level. Covariate data consisted of Total Reading Battery scores on the Stanford Achievement Test (1973).

The treatment groups comprised 25 children in the experimental group and 25 fifth graders in the control group randomly assigned to treatment groups from two ability grouped reading classes at approximate grade level in a suburban metroplex elementary school.

Procedures

For six weeks the experimental group received sentence combining instruction defined in this study as the manipulation of sentence patterns to produce complex sentences plus the organization and writing of paragraphs and stories. The experimental group met for one half of the 90 minute language arts period while the control group remained in the regular classroom for the second half (45 minutes) of the regularly scheduled language arts class. Materials used in the study consisted of a set of twenty lessons designed by the researcher in part from texts in use by both groups. Classroom teachers prepared lesson plans from manuals accompanying texts for traditional instruction. At the end of treatment both groups were tested for reading comprehension, writing maturity, and improvement of free writing.

Results

The results showed that students who received sentence combining instruction as defined in this study had significantly improved reading comprehension, written language, and free writing scores after treatment compared to students who received no sentence-combining instruction.

The results of the present study are in agreement with earlier studies which emphasized the relationship between production of more complex syntactic structures and the comprehension of more complex syntactic structures. Smith (1971) concluded that a student's production level might well determine his best receptive level. Marshall and Glock

(1978) found that better readers wrote better, while Fagan (1971) indicated that a broad repertory of syntactic structures gave a student the same advantage as having a high vocabulary, and that sentence-combining could be interpreted with flexibility to extend to paragraphs and compositions. Froese & Kurushima (1979) made specific mention of improvement in ability to organize ideas, manipulate words for certain effects, and the use of transformations as modifiers, phrases, and clauses as a result of sentence-expansion instruction. With Resnick (1979) the researcher agrees that full development of literacy skills comes only with much writing as well as reading, and with Goodman & Greene (1977) that precise mastery of relationships is dependent upon exposure and practice.

Discussion

From the point of view of the researcher, reading comprehension in this study was enhanced by the lesson plan format which insured interaction with the style of discourse used by an author through several means: the stress on the importance of meaning; the use and creation of complete discourse rather than supplying a word or completing a sentence; the consideration of alternative solutions in the combining of kernel sentences, reasons for alternatives, and decision making; the increased awareness of structure produced by a building up process or manipulation as opposed to a breaking down process of identification of parts in

structures; the stress placed on authorship (writing paragraphs and stories) as communication to a reader, and practice and repetition of basal text materials in ways new to the students.

In addition, there was some Hawthorne effect to the extent that the children participated fully putting forth a great deal of effort to do something different that they felt was important. The enthusiasm of both teacher and students produced a positive effect, in the researcher's opinion, in the study results.

Implications

This study provides evidence that manipulation of discourse is an effective means of providing greater recognition of the intended meaning of other authors, and that sentence-combining instruction which includes authorship provides improvement of the use of syntax in its written form.

In terms of the design of instructional materials it appears that the interaction of a variety of ways of presenting the same materials gives students greater insight into meaning, and that the materials must be challenging. Since materials were designed from existing texts, and interaction with these materials seemed to improve reading comprehension and writing maturity, classroom teachers could make use of such materials in their instruction.

References

- Brown, V. L., Hammil, D. D., & Wiederholt, J. L. Test of reading comprehension. Austin: Pro-Ed, 1978.
- Christensen, F. Notes toward a new rhetoric: Six essays for teachers. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- Cooper, C. R. An outline for writing sentence-combining problems. English Journal, 1973, 62(1), 96-103.
- Elkind, D. Children and adolescents. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Fagan, W. Transformations and comprehension. The Reading Teacher, 1971, 25, 169-172.
- Fillmore, C. Frame semantics and the nature of language. Origins and Evolution of Language and Speech. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, October 1976, 280.
- Froese, V., & Kurushima, S. The effects of sentence expansion practice on the reading comprehension and writing ability of third-graders. Reading Research: Studies and Applications. Twenty-eighth Yearbook of The National Reading Conference, 1979.
- Goodman, Y., & Greene, J. Grammar and reading in the classroom. In R. Shuy (Ed.), Linguistic theory: What can it say about reading? Newark: International Reading Association, 1977.
- Hammill, D. D., & Larsen, S. C. Test of written language. Austin: Pro-Ed, 1978.
- Hunt, K. Syntactic maturity in school children and adults. Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development, 1970, 35, 3.

- Madden, R., Gardner, E., Rudman, H., Karlsen, B., & Merwin, J. Stanford Achievement Test, Primary III. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.
- Marshall, N., & Glock, M. Comprehension of connected discourse, a study into the relationships between the structure of text and information recalled. Reading Research Quarterly, 1979, 14, 1.
- Memering, W. D. Recent theories and practices in the teaching of composition. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1971, 3260-A, No. 72-275, 256pp.
- Menyuk, P. Language and maturation. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977.
- Miller, B. C., & Ney, J. The effect of systematic oral exercises on the writing of fourth-grade students. Research in the Teaching of English, 1968, 2(1), 44-61.
- Minsky, M. A. Framework for representing knowledge. In P. H. Winston (Ed.), The psychology of computer vision. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.
- Nelson, K. Facilitating children's syntax acquisition. Developmental Psychology, 1977, 13(2), 101-107.
- O'Donnell, R. C., Griffin, W., & Norris, R. Syntax of kindergarten and elementary school children: A transformational analysis. Research Report No. 8. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1967.
- O'Hare, F. Sentence-combining: Improving student writing without formal grammar instruction. Research Report No. 15. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1973.

- Palmero, D. S., & Molfese, D. L. Language acquisition from age five onward. Psychological Bulletin, 1972, 78(6), 409-428.
- Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. The psychology of the child. New York: Basic Books, 1969.
- Richards, I. A. How to read a page. New York: W. W. Norton, 1942.
- Smith, W. The effect of transformed syntactic structures on reading. In C. Braun (Ed.), Language, reading, and the communication process. Newark: International Reading Association, 1971.
- Stotsky, S. L. Sentence-combining as a curricular activity: Its effect on written language development and reading comprehension. Research in the Teaching of English, 1975, 9, 30-71.
- Strong, W. Close-up: Sentence combining, back to basics and beyond. English Journal, 1976, 65(2), 46-64.